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REVIEW OF FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS IN FIELDS WITH WHICH THE SUB-COMMISSION HAS BEEN OR MAY BE CONCERNED

REVIEW OF DEVELOPMENTS RELATED TO RECOMMENDATIONS MADE IN EARLIER STUDIES

ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF INTOLERANCE AND OF DISCRIMINATION BASED ON RELIGION OR BELIEF

Written statement submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[14 July 1997]

1. The question of religious freedom is not only an issue of individual freedom but also one of collective rights. This is particularly true in the case of a people who struggle to preserve an ancient religious tradition when policies of a totalitarian ruler attempt to eradicate it. In such situations, the denial of religious freedom violates both individual and collective rights because the ultimate aim of the regime is to destroy the very basis of a rich cultural heritage of a people.

2. The Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, in its landmark resolution 1991/10 of 23 August 1991 on Tibet, expressed its concern "at the continuing reports of violations of fundamental human rights and freedoms which threaten the distinct cultural, religious and national identity of the Tibetan people". In the intervening six years, the Chinese authorities have carried out new policies to curtail religious freedom in Tibet. Far from respecting religious liberties supposedly guaranteed under China's Constitution, the Chinese authorities even now say that they want to transform Tibet into an atheist region.

3. For example, on 26 November 1996, Xizang Ribao, an official Chinese newspaper in Tibet, said:

> "... the influence of religion and traditional concepts are especially serious. Some cadres and people, instead of fostering lofty communist ideals, regard religious belief as their spiritual pillar; they have no faith in that only under the Communist Party's leadership and by taking the socialist road can a free, happy life become a reality, but regard turning of the wheel [of Tibetan Buddhism] and burning the incense as the 'magic medicine' for freeing oneself from suffering; they do not rely on science and civilization to transform the objective world, but use religion or superstitious ideas to obstruct the exploitation and utilization of resources; they do not use their wisdom and strength to serve the community and benefit the people, but waste their precious time to pursue the illusory next life; they do not use the limited financial resources to develop production, shake off poverty and become well off, but generously donate them to lamaseries; and they do not let their children receive modern education and become useful people of the country but send them to lamaseries to become monks and nuns."

4. The Chinese authorities launched an unprecedented anti-Dalai Lama campaign after holding the "Third National Forum on Work in Tibet" at Beijing in 1994. Vitriolic attacks on the Dalai Lama subsequently appeared in materials used for political education and in January 1995 the campaign was publicly launched in the official media. By this time what was unusual was not the violence of the language used, but the fact that it criticized the Dalai Lama on religious rather than political grounds. For the first time since 1979, Beijing attacked his religious credibility and suitability for leadership: "The purpose of Buddhism is to deliver all living creatures in a peaceful manner. Now the Dalai Lama and his clique have violated the religious doctrine and even have spread rumours to fool and incite one people against the other. In what way can he be regarded as a spiritual leader? ... As for the Dalai Lama, he has always incorporated 'Tibetan Independence' into the doctrines which he preaches in his sermons ... wildly attempting to use godly strength to poison and bewitch the masses ... Such flagrant deceptiveness and demagoguery constitute a blasphemy to Buddhism." 1/

1/ "Clearly Understand the True Nature of the Dalai Clique, Oppose Splittism and Safeguard Stability", Xizang Ribao (Tibet Daily), 10 March 1995.

5. In a further attempt to alienate the Dalai Lama from his people and followers of Tibetan Buddhism in the world, on 26 January 1996 an order was issued by the Department of Culture of the so-called "Tibet Autonomous Region" to remove all photographs of the Dalai Lama from Norbulingka and the Potala Palace in Lhasa. The ban was eventually extended to all public institutions and private homes in Tibet. For instance, on 7 May 1996 a Chinese "work team" (Chinese: gongzuo dui) arrived at Gaden monastery near Lhasa, tasked with removing all photographs of the Dalai Lama. The monks refused to cooperate, sparking off a riot. When Chinese armed security personnel raided the monastery one monk, Kelsang Nyendrak, died after being shot and five other monks, including 14-year-old Gelek Jinpa, received bullet wounds; 85 to 90 monks were arrested. On 3 June 1997, Xizang Ribao said that 14 of the monks were sentenced in 1996 as "criminals" who incited "monks to shout reactionary slogans, organizing illegal demonstrations, smashing up a police substation, beating up State functionaries, stubbornly following the Dalai clique, (and) vainly attempting to smash up the motherland".

6. In April 1996, China launched the "Strike Hard or Crack Down Severely On Crimes" campaign, targeted at crushing corruption and crime. Within Tibet Chinese authorities have focused on "splittists" - individuals who support Tibetan independence and the leadership of the Dalai Lama. The main subcampaign of "Strike Hard" within Tibet is the so-called "Patriotic Re-education Campaign" and followed from earlier campaigns, such as that of banning photographs of the Dalai Lama, which aimed to stifle politically restive monks and nuns. The "Patriotic Re-education Campaign" in Tibet has led to widespread arrests and expulsions of monks and nuns who have refused to be "re-educated" along Chinese communist lines.

7. The re-education campaign was conducted by work teams who entered monasteries and nunneries to force monks and nuns to renounce Tibetan independence, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Gedhun Choeyki Nyima and the Panchen Lama. At Drepung monastery near Lhasa, for example, 180 communist cadres were involved in the re-education sessions which began on 1 August 1996.

8. Human rights groups and other sources report more than 110 arrests and at least two deaths since China launched the campaign in monasteries and nunneries in Tibet. Twenty-four of the arrests were a direct result of monks questioning a work team's form of education. Tenchok Tenphel, a 27-year-old monk, was reportedly arrested at Sakya monastery on 1 September 1996 in front of a re-education session. He died on 14 September at Sakya District Prison. Although the Chinese authorities said that he died by "committing suicide", Tibetans allege that he died as a result of torture in prison.

9. Another grave consequence of the above campaign in Tibet is the expulsion of monks who refused to accept the Chinese policy. According to the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in India, 1,295 monks were expelled in 1996. Many of the expelled monks have fled to India and Nepal in recent months. "Those with a bad attitude to the studying and those with poor results or deliberately causing obstacles to the study will be severely criticized and their right to remain among the number of monks will be struck out", said an official notice handed to each monk at Sera monastery in mid-June 1996.

10. In November 1996, the Chinese authorities launched another campaign called "Last Battle" against the Dalai Lama, aimed at eradicating any vestiges of the Dalai Lama's influence from all levels of society. A report stipulated that the anti-splittist campaign, launched in the region's monasteries this year, must be broadened and signalled the adoption of "administrative measures to resolve the uncontrolled proliferation of religious festivals and shrines". The report by the "Tibet Central Committee" of the so-called "Tibet Autonomous Region" stressed the strengthening of controls over daily life in the region which must also involve the close supervision of literature and the arts to ensure that they fulfil the socialist role of "serving the people" rather than propagating "spiritual garbage".

11. As regards the disappearance of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, the Eleventh Panchen Lama of Tibet, China, after more than a year of denials, finally admitted to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child and the United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (in May-June 1996) that the boy was in Beijing's custody. However, China continues to fail to declare publicly the whereabouts of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima and his parents. The Society for Threatened Peoples supports the decision of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (see E/CN.4/1997/34) that China should provide the Working Group with documents supporting its claim that Gedhun Choekyi Nyima and his parents had appealed to the Government for protection and at present are "leading normal lives and enjoying perfect health".

12. The April 1997 announcement of the sentencing of Chadrel Rinpoche, the former acting abbot of Tashi Lhunpo monastery, the seat of the Panchen Lamas in Shigatse, to six years of prison for "leaking State secrets" is clear proof that he had been under incommunicado detention for more than two years. The whereabouts of Chadrel Rinpoche after his arrest on 17 May 1995 are still unknown. Chadrel Rinpoche and his associates were imprisoned primarily because they defended Gedhun Choekyi Nyima as the reincarnation of the Tenth Panchen Lama.

13. The situation in Tibet clearly indicates that the Chinese authorities continue to impose severe restrictions on freedom of religion and that the overall situation of human rights there has deteriorated since the Sub-Commission adopted resolution 1991/10. The Society for Threatened Peoples, therefore, urges all the expert members of the Sub-Commission to pay close attention to the deteriorating situation of religious freedom in Tibet.

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